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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

MARCH 1st, 1858.

BEETHOVEN'S MASS IN C.

Contributed by E. HOLMES.

THE Masses of the last century exhibit a strong family relationship, particularly those of Haydn and Mozart; according to the elegance of mind and the facility of genius of the father, such are the features of the children—different, yet the same. The pleasure of the ear was to those composers a sort of religion; their wealth of melody, their fulness of ideas, and command of all the effects which delight in voice, wind, or string, rendered their compositions a simple offering to God, and an acknowledgement of the powers conferred on them. On this theory alone can be explained many movements in their Masses, which please so much in a secular manner that they lead the catholic hearer to his Creator in “the ways of pleasantness;” nor can the senses which delight in them easily be deficient in a natural piety. Far from imitating the severe models of the Palestrina school and its gloomy and awful character, they sought to engage in the service of religion whatever was graceful, sweet, and attractive—awakening by this means the affectionate feelings of their auditory. The highest music has this softening and humanizing influence; Mozart's Masses are the votive offerings of a pious Catholic, who would identify the cause of religion with the charms of the most exquisite melody; and Haydn's contributions to the service of his church are made in a kindred spirit.

The first bold deviation from this flowery path in modern Catholic service music, was made by Beethoven in his Mass in C. Quitting the traditions of his predecessors, and reading anew the text of the Mass, he produced by the power of imagination and reflection, a work which, for its artistic novelty, stands conspicuous among the productions of the century—a beacon or landmark. Church music is no longer exclusive; its doors are opened to any who have the temerity to compose in pure self-dependence, and not leaning on tradition. From this some few things advantageous to the art have resulted; the composer himself has greatly improved upon his first idea in the Mass in D, and the public have some pieces of this calibre by other composers, whose extensive plan in orchestra and chorus prevents from being often heard or thoroughly digested. Whatever is great or pre-eminent in this new order of sacred music, depends mostly on an army of performers—the most lavish means of orchestra and chorus. The composers are thus condemned to long periods of silence; but when their works are performed, they refresh the spirit jaded with formulas and longing to meet new ideas half-way.

Parts of the Mass in D of Beethoven and of the Requiem of Berlioz, not similar in design to any known sacred music, are still of a power and majesty that will bear comparison with any. The noble independence of the ideas causes in the hearer a glow of admiration, and, despite our reverence for antiquity, we must admit the solid defence of a school which avers—*whatever has a good effect, is good*. Nor is the cause of music harmed by allowing a proper freedom of thought to composers. Our enlarged orchestras and increased powers of effect demand ideas commensurate in grandeur; and, after all, it remains a task of the greatest difficulty and of rare accomplishment to awaken enthusiasm in the human soul. Let composers take what means they may, they cannot err in accomplishing this object.

Beethoven's Mass in C, the first model of a new style of choral music, though for a long time under the ban of strangeness and eccentricity, like other works by the same hand, has gradually won its way in public, to favour and even popularity. Each of its divisions possesses a strongly-marked character; and, notwithstanding many surprises of the ear, abrupt modulations, and uncommon phrases, the voice of music in it is never absent. To the uninitiated, the Kyrie in C, $\frac{3}{4}$, is not without a full share of the perplexities which arise from sudden transitions, remote harmonies, and singular closes. Patient study and the habit of hearing, however, lead us more and more into the ideal of the composer, and prove the truth and the regularity of his conception. The opening of this Mass is one of its most characteristic parts. It is a grave and pathetic choral prayer, of a severe character of melody, expressing the import of the text, and discarding all ornament intended for the mere gratification of the ear; the time *Andante con moto*, $\frac{3}{4}$; the score choral, with a full orchestra except flutes and trumpets. The rich, subdued murmur of low strings in the outset, forms a most attractive commencement; and the soft, low tone of voices and instruments, disposes the listener to suspense and solemn feeling. Beethoven is known at once in the effective five-part harmony of the first bars:

The musical score shows the beginning of the Kyrie in C major, 3/4 time. It is a five-part setting for voices and strings. The Soprano and Alto parts enter with the Kyrie eleison text. The Tenor and Bass parts enter with a similar text. The Viola and Bassi parts provide a harmonic foundation with a piano-piano (pp) dynamic.

A smooth feature of the first violins, which begins with the voices at the second bar,

doubled in harmony by the seconds, completes

the orchestral disposition. That this simplicity may not prove insipid, a *crescendo* is provided, of which the chord of E is the climax—a powerful effect, and the more surprising as it introduces immediately the cadence in C. The moving quavers which flow continually through this movement with melodious expression, are now taken up by the clarionets and bassoons in thirds doubled,—



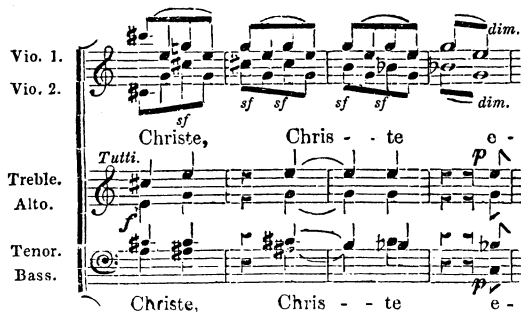
and the strings coming in contrary motion, form a cadence of excellent orchestral effect. All that follows, to those who do not know the music, is surprise; the original key seems lost; we wander through a labyrinth of surprising harmonies, and with a treatment of subjects quite as strange. The first solo is of the utmost simplicity:—



This closes at the eighth bar in E minor, and is treated by Beethoven contrapuntally and in canon after his extraordinary manner:—



By degrees the musician learns to appreciate ideas so nobly extravagant. The eight bars of chorus following in E minor are of a plaintive beauty; and the symphony in the major of E, in which the bassoons imitate the violins in contrary motion, charms the ear. From hence we are borne in a few bars into the regions of remote harmony. The passage which follows is curious alike for its accent and its enharmonic changes; it is, perhaps, the salient point of the Kyrie—of striking invention, and eminently beautiful. Trouble and agitation are expressed in these accents of the chorus:—



The last chord, $b7$, is treated as an extreme sharp sixth on C (the $B\sharp$ an $A\sharp$); and the resolution, $\frac{5}{4}$ on $B\sharp$ in the bass, produces a charming cadence. This is repeated; then, still in E, the subject is

sung by basses and tenors, with a holding note from the treble chorus. Extremely beautiful is the orchestral effect here produced; but it is time to remember the original key, and the composer takes this short route to it from E major:—



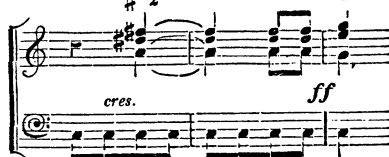
At the next chord, with the whole orchestra *forte*, we have returned to C on these harmonies,—



and the first strain is repeated. The treble solo at "Kyrie" is now heard with different treatment:



This grateful progression introduces at the tutti *crescendo* a finely-planned, magnificent surprise. The C in the bass, $\sharp\frac{6}{2}$, is turned into a pedal note,



and a return to the key so well prepared results, as to strike the ear with pleasure, notwithstanding its novelty and boldness. The holding notes of the voices accompanying the melody in the orchestra are of an effect peculiar to Beethoven—his gravest musical colouring. At the conclusion, the sustaining of the unison G by them all, the bass even ending a fifth above the root, produces an effect the most mysterious and solemn. However vague and strange the eccentric modulation and course of this Kyrie may at first appear, its clearness, the genuine music in its design, and its place and connection with classical models, become continually more apparent. It is a chapter in the art which we owe to the meditation

of a conscientious master, whose new effects and independent plan enlarge the scope of music.

The *Gloria*, *Allegro* $\frac{4}{4}$, designed in colossal proportions, forms altogether the most powerful division of the Mass. Simple diatonic grandeur in the melodies for the voices, brilliant instrumentation, a triumphant energy of style, and a great clearness and decision in every feature of the music, render this composition memorable as the poetical conception of a Gloria. In the three movements which compose it, the interest is varied and constantly heightened. The opening in chords for the voices, with running scales in thirds on the violins, raises expectation. After the sustained chords of the tonic and subdominant have returned to C, an accented phrase from trebles and altos in octaves forms the chief feature of the music:—



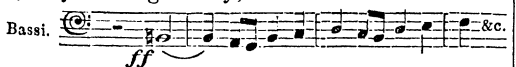
This phrase is prolonged and imitated in all the instrumental symphonies, and becomes an excellent orchestral response to the voices when heard alone. Its energy contrasts well with the supplementary phrase for the chorus unaccompanied:—



When at the half bar, the orchestra of strings, aided by brass instruments and drums, enters with commanding energy,—



we observe a great purpose developed in an idea apparently capricious. How much of pure gold has Beethoven the alchemist extracted from common things in this manner! At "Benedicimus" the chorus intone the chords of G and C, suddenly descending from the harmony of C to B flat at "adoramus," to express religious sentiment. This gothic progression, unused in our times, produces a thrilling effect. It was approved by the master, who has introduced it also in the second finale of *Fidelio*. The unison phrase last quoted, now prolonged, appears as the bass at "Glorificamus" to a chord of $\frac{6}{8}$ on B \flat , sustained *ff* by the voices. It proceeds thus joyfully and vigorously,—



and on arriving at C, we greet the same feature turned into a free canon between the soprano and alto, to a florid accompaniment of violins. After a grand and majestic choral cadence, the same

phrase is carried on in an orchestral symphony, closing and subsiding in this delightful manner to introduce music of a new character in accordance with the text:—



The expressive and elegant figure which appears in the third bar of this extract, is employed as an accompaniment to tenor solo and chorus alternately, through all the rest of this movement, which also derives from it its chief character. The *Qui tollis*, *Andante mosso*, in F minor, is a purely dramatic conception. The solo led off by the alto, with syncopated motion of the strings, is plaintive, and mingled with the exclamations of the chorus, excites all the listening faculties:—



For more than twenty bars the voices continue with this low accompaniment without wind instruments, and the finest tones of the solo singers are displayed in the most melodious phrases. At the cadence of the vocal quartet a place is made for the wind instruments, and a solo clarinet and bassoon are heard in exquisite response. These bars in A flat possess consummate elegance. The "Qui sedes," tutti, is intoned in massive unison, and to this succeeds the Miserere, a powerful passage, in which, though the progression is not new, we may discern new treatment of old materials. The syncopation of voices and instruments is most effective:—



From this place all is rich enjoyment, the most solemn and impassioned feelings are awakened by the composer. The following phrase of oboes and clarionets on the low G of the horns,—

Oboi.
Clari.
Sves.
Corni.

leads, when taken up chorally in the bass in the succeeding bars, to a sublime passage; the forte on the B \sharp is of this description; such a cry of agony is rarely heard in music. The charm of this movement is its freedom from exaggeration; it is varied and new, without transgressing the bounds of nature and propriety.

Quoniam, $\frac{4}{4}$, *Allegro ma non troppo*, is one of the greatest productions of the art. Its effects and style are of a simplicity, breadth, and grandeur unequalled. The singular theme is first given with oboes and flutes in unison, accompanied by tenors and violoncellos:—

Flauti.
Oboi.
Viola.
Celli.

All the instruments and voices take up this subject in unison, then gradually spreading into harmony, make a majestic cadence in C, to introduce the fugue on a bass subject "Cum sancto." The conduct of the music here is quite unprecedented; no one who has heard can forget its electrical effect; even Handel himself has nowhere struck more like a thunderbolt. After this subject has been answered in all the four parts,—

Cum Sancto Spi - ri - tu in glo-ria De-i Patris.

the fugue is interrupted, and the opening subject introduced in the bass with florid violin accompaniment and holding notes from the wind band; the hearer thinks nothing can be more magnificent:

Vio. 1.
Vio. 2.
Coro. Bassi.

Quo - ni - am tu so-lus, tu

It is surpassed, however, when this subject is transferred in unison to the stringed instruments, and the voices accompany. The iterated G of the trumpets, afterwards held on by the treble chorus, is of wonder-working effect, and can only be appreciated in the hearing:—

Vio. 1.
Vio. 2.
Tromb.
Tenor.
Alto.
Treble.
Bass.
Bassi.

Unis.
Treble. Quo -
Alto. Quo - ni - am
Quo - ni - am,
Quo - - ni - am tu

Grandeur and triumph speak intelligibly here, and memory lingers over the glorious passage. The fugue resumed is worked in clear counterpoint, scarcely differing in that respect from Haydn and Mozart. One of the most singular ideas of Beethoven occurs at Amen, which is always heard with amazement; repetition alone reconciles the ear to the sudden progression. From A minor we arrive at G \flat in six bars, and by this singular sequence of fundamental harmonies:—

Chorus. Orchestra. Chorus. Orchestra.

A - men. A - men.

So on to G \flat , returning to C by one chord:—

A - men. A - men.

The movement from key to key by fundamental chords at "tu solus altissimus" is a new and grand idea. A playful imitation of the fugue theme for soprano solo introduces a charming effect of the chorus alone, *tutti*, *p*. The cadence made in C, the choral phrase is thus beautifully altered,—

Treble.
Alto.
Tenor.
Bass.

Tutti. p A - - - men. Solo.
Tutti. p A - - - men, A - - -

leaving the resolution on the \sharp on F \sharp in suspense, and commencing the next passage without harmony, which is only indicated by the melody. The rich play of fancy is continued to the end in a noble and prolonged cadence; it confers a character of vigour and originality on the Gloria which the fugue alone would not have done; and it is in the noble appendix from the Amen that the poetical fancy of Beethoven is chiefly recognised.

(To be continued)